

Minister of Public Instruction. Married to Charles Hugo's widow, guardian of the great poet's grandchildren, artist, author, Garibaldian volunteer, politician, deputy, and minister, M. Lockroy was — and is still — a man of very broad views. He had formed a poor opinion of the "Manifesto of the Five" at the time of its appearance, and he was disgusted by the ensuing attacks, which emanated for the most part from the reactionary press. In these circumstances he resolved on a somewhat bold course, that of offering the red -ribbon to the much-abused author, as an official recognition of his literary attainments, and as a kind of solatium for the insults heaped upon him.

At the same time M. Lockroy realised that as Zola, angered by the behaviour of Bardoux in 1878, had then declared he would not accept a decoration, it would be advisable to sound him unofficially in the first instance.

The minister ended by selecting as his intermediary a lady who knew the novelist well, and she at once repaired to Mddan to ascertain his views.¹ At her first words Zola began to protest, reminding her of the public declaration he had formerly made, and adding that if he now accepted the red ribbon he would surely cover himself with ridicule. But the minister's messenger insisted, pointing out, notably,

that prejudiced and ignorant people were on all
sides accusing him of deliberate immorality, even
obscenity, and that his official nomination to the Legion of
Honour might act

¹ The story is told on the authority of Madame Charpentier,
wife of the publisher, but it is somewhat doubtful whether the lady in
question was herself, though she and her husband knew M. Lockroy as well
as Zola. If not, the intermediary may have been a lady related to a minister
whose energy made him famous during the siege of Paris. There was
such a lady who knew Zola well. English and American readers will
doubtless regard the whole affair as being "very French."